

**REMARKS**

Claims 1, 3-9, and 11-18 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 2 and 10 are canceled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein, claims 1, 3-9 and 11-14 and 16 are amended, and claims 17-18 are added. No new matter is added.

Applicants thank the Examiner for the indication that claims 2-8 and 10-16 contain allowable subject matter.

In the Office Action, claims 1 and 9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,823,075 to Perry in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,731,407 to Hayama. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

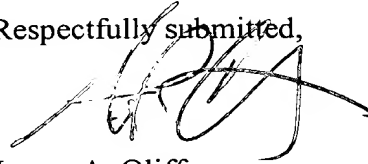
Allowable dependent claim 2 is incorporated into independent claim 1. Similarly, subject matter from allowable dependent claim 10 is incorporated into independent claim 9. Because allowable dependent claim 2 did not require a continuous tone input image, this feature has been omitted from corresponding independent method claim 9 for consistency. New claims 17-18 depend from claims 9 and 1, respectively, and add that the image is a continuous tone image. Dependent claims 3-6, 8, 11-14 and 16 are amended to depend from their respective independent claim. Dependent claim 7 is amended to depend from claim 6 for proper antecedent support.

Accordingly, independent claims 1 and 9 and claims dependent therefrom define over the applied combination of Perry and Hayama and contain patentable subject matter. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims 1, 3-9 and 11-18 are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



James A. Oliff  
Registration No. 27,075

Stephen P. Catlin  
Registration No. 36,101

JAO:SPC/fpw

Date: February 28, 2005

**OLIFF & BERRIDGE, PLC**  
**P.O. Box 19928**  
**Alexandria, Virginia 22320**  
**Telephone: (703) 836-6400**

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